

Renison University College

Annual Report 2024-2025

Territorial Acknowledgement

With gratitude, we acknowledge that Renison University College is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Hodinohsyó:ni, and Attawandaran (Neutral) Peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land granted to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River from mouth to source.

Our active work toward reconciliation takes place in all corners of our campus through research, learning, teaching, community building, and outreach. We are guided by the work of the [Office of Indigenous Relations](#) at the University of Waterloo.

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Notes from the Board

As I conclude my fourth and final year as Chair, I have had the privilege of witnessing remarkable growth and transformation across Renison University College. Over these years, we have navigated complex challenges while remaining steadfast in our commitment to providing programs that truly meet the evolving needs and interests of our students. At times, this has meant making difficult decisions regarding areas of low student demand, ensuring that our resources are directed toward programs and experiences that have the greatest impact. As a former alumnus, I am proud of the Board, the senior leadership team and the faculty's commitment to put the needs of students first.

Balancing the budget has been a challenge shared by many in the post-secondary sector. Reductions have been necessary; however, are only part of the equation in a community that thrives. We have continued to make thoughtful investments in what matters most: the student experience. This includes expanding supports for student life. For example, the creation of the Link Inclusion Lounge. A space where students can express and celebrate their uniqueness including religion, culture, race, ability, ethnic background, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

As an institution of higher learning, we are steadfast in advancing our commitment to reconciliation with the first peoples of this land. We will continue to do this work through the Reconciliation and Restoring Committee of the Board. Equally important is our commitment to address the impact of racism and discrimination, and to examine where this shows up in our systems. These commitments are part of our strategic plan and will continue to be a focus of our future, as we seek to create a learning environment rooted in respect, healing, and belonging.

I am especially encouraged by the leadership and vision of our new President Dr. Marc Jerry, who joined us a little over a year ago, and has already made a significant mark on our community. Under Marc's guidance, Renison is building on its strengths and moving confidently into the future.

Serving as Chair through a period of challenge, transition and renewal has been an honour. I remain deeply proud of the work our Board, leadership team, staff, faculty, and students. Together, we have created a Renison community that consistently evolves, inspires, and leads.

Warmly,

Karen Spencer, Board Chair
Board of Governors
Renison University College

Message from the President and Vice-Chancellor

I am known for occasionally quoting the 16th century reformer, theologian, and church leader Martin Luther; today I am drawing inspiration from civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. who is quoted as saying, “you don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

In the 16 months since I assumed the office of president of Renison University College, we have been collectively working towards creating a plan for the future of the College. The first few months saw us working closely with students, staff, faculty and Board members to develop a shared vision of our future. What should Renison look like in five years? Through a variety of working groups and visioning sessions conducted over the last year, we not only prioritized our strategic plan, but we also created a unified vision for the future of Renison. We created the staircase. We took those first steps.

I must take this opportunity to acknowledge that some of our steps have been extremely difficult. This past year included some difficult decisions: staff reductions, program redundancies, and structural changes, in order to balance our budgets on the path towards restored financial sustainability. Structural changes ultimately affect people. We appreciate all of the hands and hearts that have been instrumental in writing Renison’s story to date; all of these individuals are part of our collective success.

Together, we are now embarking on our journey forward. We recognize and appreciate that in order to move forward and upwards, we first need to examine our past. There are things that we must stop doing if we are committed to reaching our shared goals for the future. Recently, I tasked the Senior Leadership Team with re-imagining what Renison’s Organizational Structure might look like in five years’ time. While we have not finalized our ideal structure yet, we are collectively understanding the need for structural alignment to support our strategic goals.

These first steps towards the future can be daunting, but the rewards are meaningful and lasting. We know that our future depends on embarking on this journey; we know where this path leads because we shaped it together.

I am proud of the work that this Annual Report represents. We have laboured to take this first step towards our future. I invite you to read this Annual Report and join us as we embark on our shared journey.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Marc Jerry
President and Vice-Chancellor
Renison University College

Financial Statement Highlights

May 1, 2024 – April 30, 2025

Total Operating Budget = \$23 million

Statement of Financial Position (in 000s)

Cash	3,588
Investments	4,480
Capital Assets	27,860
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	1,492
Student deposits and fee advances	437
Debt	7,793
Employee future benefits obligation	4,541

Statement of Operations (in 000s)

Revenue	
Government grants	5,246
Tuition	10,439
Residence fees and conferences	2,255
Food Services	1,534
Expenses	
Salaries, wages and benefits	17,403
University services	1,509
Contracted Services	530
Utilities, repairs and maintenance	661
Office, general and admin	327
Academic support costs	349

Endowment Value

Value of Endowment Portfolio as of April 30, 2025 = \$4,479,771

Value of Endowment Portfolio as of April 30, 2024 = \$3,903,904

Giving At Renison

Total Cash and Pledges	\$1,133,063
Total Funds Awarded	\$275,914

Course Enrollments

Languages and Culture (Applied Language Studies, English for Multilingual Speakers, graduate and undergraduate English, History, Religious Studies, East Asian Studies, Studies in Islamic and Arab Cultures)	3,458
Social Engagement and Innovation (Social Development Studies, School of Social Work)	6,488
Community and Professional Education (Renison Institute of Ministry, Sakura Japanese Language School, Renison International Office, non-credit Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language, English Language Institute, Indigenous Studies)	2,990

Setting Students up for Success with new Programs: Future Ready and Leadership Training in Entrepreneurship

By Jane Karanassiou and Nela Maluckov, Curriculum Managers, School of Global Engagement and Education

Future Ready

This summer, the School of Global Engagement and Education (SGEE) launched the three-week Future Ready program for students aged 15 to 17. This initial session brought together 20 Canadian and international high school students from around the world to explore significant global challenges and experience first-hand the academic and innovative ecosystem of the University of Waterloo. Inspired by SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, student teams were tasked with creating a waste reduction initiative aimed at helping the University of Waterloo achieve zero waste designation by 2035.

Classes at Renison centred upon guiding project teams through the design thinking cycle with a strong emphasis on themes of culture, innovation, and communication. In-class collaboration and student bonding were further solidified by a robust events calendar. Trips to Niagara Falls, St Jacobs Farmer's Market and Toronto as well as activities such as Speed Friending and Karaoke provided opportunities to extend intercultural experiences. The program also offered a dynamic mix of integrated Waterloo lectures, tours, labs and hands-on workshops, providing students the opportunity to engage with all six Waterloo faculties and experience problem solving from diverse disciplinary perspectives.

Highlights for students (and instructors!) included a timely International Relations Simulation of the June Nato summit led by Political Science professor Veronica Kitchen with the follow-up opportunity to compare the success of our negotiating tactics with the actual outcomes of this Nato meeting. Trish Van Katwyk, the Director of Renison's School of Social Work introduced us to Carewebs and Grassroots community organizing through the creation of personally meaningful zines or mini booklets, and Professor Erin O'Connell from the faculty of Environment highlighted wicked problems and the complexities of recycling. The final showcase event had teams introduce and present their social media videos of their sustainable initiatives to a panel of experts, including a representative from Waterloo's Sustainability Office. Student-produced videos delivered a rich and eclectic blend of humor and empathy, effectively driving their messages home. As instructors more accustomed to traditional academic presentations, this was a refreshing and compelling display of creativity to engage and persuade.

As always, when looking at future sessions, feedback is instrumental to our planning and the positive response from these students has been encouraging. Planning a meaningful summer experience for young learners outside their routine academic school year is no small task, yet feedback like "this was one of the best things that happened to me" and reflections on the value of learning "something different from our normal subjects" clearly suggest we're on the right track. Throughout the Future Ready program, students embraced the opportunity to explore new ideas, collaborate across disciplines, and engage in learning that felt fresh, relevant, and inspiring.

Leadership Training in Entrepreneurship

Another successful program launched at the end of July, welcoming 77 students from Mexico's Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) for a 4-week Leadership Training in Entrepreneurship Program hosted by

Renison and Waterloo's Conrad School of Entrepreneurship and Business. Working in interdisciplinary teams, students progressed through the stages of problem identification, analysis, solutioning and venture creation with a culminating pitch competition on the final day of the program. The overarching focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encouraged creative approaches to addressing concerns impacting the lives of these students such as equitable access to affordable medication, reliable housing options in Mexico City, and food insecurity. The final pitches were excellent with the panel of expert judges ultimately awarding first prize to EnerChain, a venture for the real-time verification of energy sources using smart sensors and blockchain technology.

As instructors, what stood out as exceptional with this cohort of IPN students was their proactive attitude towards maximizing every learning opportunity and their consistently high levels of engagement throughout the program. Whether in classes at Renison, lectures at Conrad or visits to the SDG Ideas Factory, Velocity, Communitech or the Accelerator Centre, their openness to new experiences and ways of learning was very inspiring and we greatly valued the meaningful opportunities we had to learn from their insights and experiences.

In addition to all the hard work in class, there was of course plenty of free time to visit local attractions and even achieve the lifetime dream of visiting the Justin Bieber Museum in Stratford! Students valued learning about and immersing themselves in Waterloo and Canadian culture through the many planned excursions and events - so much so - that many of them hope to return one day for graduate studies.

Aside from a few groans about the walking distance between Renison and Engineering 7 and the unexpected heat of a Canadian summer (Why did I bring so many sweaters?), this program stands out as one where the intended outcomes were not only met but exceeded. Collaborative initiatives like this take a great deal of planning and the active involvement of multiple stakeholders. However, with feedback such as the following, we are strongly encouraged to continue and build upon this work.

"Every class there was something new, very different approaches to solve all kinds of problems - they are easily the best classes I have ever had"

Getting Kraft-y

By Cort Egan, Director, External Relations and Communications

Stefany Kraft knows what it's like to be a Renison and University of Waterloo student. She's a proud graduate, having double majored in Peace and Conflict Studies and Social Development Studies before completing her Bachelor of Social Work at Renison. Today, Stefany is Renison's Student Experience Coordinator, and our students couldn't be in better hands.

Trying to improve the student experience while the College is in deficit means getting crafty – and Stefany knows how to get crafty. Two recent projects that Stefany spearheaded put all of her skills to the test – and, not unlike her academic career, she passed with flying colours.

Project 1: Addition of a Kitchenette in the Link Inclusion Lounge

For those unfamiliar with the Link Inclusion Lounge, it is an intentionally designed space that invites all students, but particularly those from equity-deserving communities, to be themselves and connect with others on campus. The room is large and comfortably furnished; the students themselves determined the layout and furnishings, and had input on the support services readily available to students. Since it opened almost a year ago, The Lounge has been a constant hub of activity with programs and events designed to help all students feel welcome and appreciated.

While the Lounge has been a huge success, feedback from students, and in particular mature students, indicated that additional kitchen space, separate from the cafeteria and dorm rooms, was needed. That was the only impetus Stefany needed to get the Link Lounge kitchenette project started.

Anyone who has undertaken a home renovation project knows that it's never as simple as it sounds, and this project was no exception. The first obstacle to overcome was costs since this was not a budgeted expense. Stefany would need to get creative. Working collaboratively with the Renison Academic Student Committee (or RASC, as it's known on campus), Stefany applied to University of Waterloo's Student Life Endowment Fund (SLEF). This fund is designed to support student-led initiatives that enhance students on campus experience. The proposal was successful.

Beyond the budget issues, this renovation experienced all of the usual pitfalls: tricky plumbing, unforeseen expenses and negotiating with various contractors and tradesmen. None of this seemed to phase Stefany. Not only was the project a success, it came in under budget, allowing Stefany (with the approval of SLEF) to purchase some additional equipment for the new student space.

Project 2: Introducing Re-Usable Eco-Containers for Cafeteria Use

In addition to her official role on campus, Stefany is also a member of Renison's Green Team, a committee of staff, faculty and students that works to develop and implement environmental and sustainability initiatives on and around campus. In that capacity, Stefany is always on the look-out for ways to reduce waste and improve sustainability efforts on campus.

Eco-Containers are heavy duty, reusable plastic food containers with a built-in lid that are dishwasher safe. The containers would solve a number of food waste problems and resolve the mystery of disappearing tableware, but again, costs were prohibitive.

This time, Stefany turned to the University of Waterloo's Sustainability Action Fund and, again, her submission was successful.

The primary environmental benefits of the eco-containers are obvious – they eliminate the need for disposable, one-time use take out containers, and they reduce food waste by providing an instant receptacle for any unfinished meals; simply close the lid and slip it into the fridge for later. It's that easy. An additional benefit, though, which is not as apparent is the replacement cost of crockery. While students are asked not to bring plates and dishes to their rooms, for a variety of reasons, they inevitably do. And once they leave the cafeteria, they rarely find their way back. Eco-containers allow students to dine where they want and when they want; the handy carabiner keeps them from disappearing.

Stefany has found creative ways to improve life at Renison, and she has done so without adding at all to Renison's budgetary concerns. Stefany knows from experience that it's the little things that can make a big difference in the lives of students, and she's doing her part in making positive change.

SDS+BSW: More than a degree, a new beginning

By Nancy Schnarr, Senior Manager, Central Communications

Looking forward at Renison means not only building and managing our physical spaces but also evaluating and updating services and program offerings. For decades, the Social Development Studies (SDS) and Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs have been pillars of Renison, meeting the needs of students as they made their way into professions like Social Worker, Teacher, or Lawyer – among many others. The two academic units worked together to support students' professional goals throughout both the SDS undergraduate degree and the 10-month BSW post-graduate degree. More recently, they embarked on further integrating the two and, after 5 years of planning, the single pathway SDS+BSW double degree will become reality for students starting in Fall 2026, pending University of Waterloo Senate approval.

Why combine these two popular degrees when they exist separately? One of the most meaningful benefits for students is that they build relationships and community with the School of Social Work as they begin their SDS degree. According to Dr. Trish Van Katwyk, School of Social Work Director, it will give students more time to become acclimatized to the field of Social Work and be better prepared for their studies and practicum. “The current 10-month program is so intense,” she says. “With more time, students can ease into some of the more difficult conversations and begin to develop a professional identity right as they’re starting their university career.”

There are logistical benefits too – instead of applying to the BSW after completing an SDS degree, students interested in Social Work only need to apply once. Plus, says Dr. Rob Case, Director of the Renison School of Social Sciences and Humanities, “the two degrees offer a broad base of knowledge and open up a number of possible trajectories for students.” This model keeps the degree flexible and tailored to each individual student's interests or goals.

The SDS+BSW double degree is a timely addition to Renison and to the University of Waterloo. According to the Canada Job Bank's Labour Market Information, Social Workers in particular will be in high demand over the next 10+ years, with issues like mental health, poverty, and addiction coming into sharp relief in many communities. Dr. Denise Marigold, former Chair of the SDS Department and key figure in the development of the new degree, emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary studies to address these issues. “We need to understand complex social issues at so many levels,” she says. “Within SDS there are Psychology, Sociology, and other interdisciplinary courses that, taken together, cover the level of individuals, families, communities, institutions, and societies. As a student enters into the Social Work profession, they will have all of these layers of understanding to support their work.”

As with any new program, the SDS+BSW double degree has taken time and collaboration to come together. Though the process has taken a number of years, Van Katwyk says it was necessary. “The initial years were spent trying to find a common ground; moving slowly means that the foundation is really strong.”

In addition to what the SDS+BSW program means for students, it's also a reflection of the mission and values of Renison. “It's a demonstration of what can happen when there is collaboration across the institution,” says Dr. Kristiina Montero, Renison's VP Academic and Dean. “It reflects the community we have built here.”

From the perspective of the departments, there is excitement about the new program. “There's definitely enthusiasm about possibilities for great collaboration with our Social Work colleagues,” says

Marigold. “The process was also done with the best interests of students in mind, which is something we hold really highly.”

The School of Social Work, too, is ready to get started. “Faculty are eager to be able to see students for a longer period of time,” says Van Katwyk. “The relational piece is really exciting for faculty and for staff.”

“There are definitely some SDS faculty members who are keen to contribute more directly to the evolution of Social Work practice and standards,” says Case. “There are quite a few of us with Social Work degrees and backgrounds, but we’re kind of on the margins of the profession so the collaboration aspect is really appealing.”

As the double degree finds its footing with students, the program will also weave into the fabric of Renison with additional points of connection found between the double degree and other academic units. The new double degree will give students a whole new experience and, for Renison, it’s an exciting new chapter of our story.

Peerless Peer Support

By Cort Egan, Director, External Relations and Communications

When asked to describe Renison in one word, Abby and Milo, both Renison Peer Leaders, answered almost in tandem: **Home!** Friends since year 1 and currently roommates, it perhaps should come as no surprise that their views on Renison are so aligned.

Abby and Milo first met three years ago when they arrived at Renison as freshmen in the Social Development Studies program. Milo is self-described as an introvert while Abby would best be described as an extrovert, but that's where the differences end. Abby and Milo are both SDS (Social Development Studies) students, destined for a career in social work. They have chosen a career anchored in helping others; little wonder they also want to help and support their fellow students.

Peer Leaders are upper year students who help to guide students, mostly lower year students but not exclusively, through their journey as university students. They act as a support system that keeps an eye out for students who appear to be struggling or need a person to talk to. Abby and Milo are perfect for this role.

"Students feel comfortable talking to us because we're also students facing similar challenges and struggles," explains Abby. "They can see themselves in us."

Milo is an SDS peer leader while Abby is a Residence Experience peer leader. As an SDS peer leader, not only does Milo offer care through listening and support through providing coping strategies, they also help to organize study sessions as exam periods draw near. This type of engagement in particular helps junior year students develop good study habits and better understand how to prepare for midterms and finals. But it's not all academics; Milo also helps to run events. They love crafting and find that it helps to relieve stress. "Nothing relieves stress like a cup of warm tea and colouring or having fun with clay magnets or shrinkydinks." These are important lessons for other students to learn – sometimes, you need to forget about academics and de-stress with some fun activities.

The role of residence experience peer leader is slightly different. Abby helps to organize and oversee events for student residents. She works very closely with Renisix, Renison's residence student committee, and sits on the Board of Governors as a student representative. Renisix is a very active group on campus; Abby is involved in running movie events, karaoke nights, Christmas and Halloween events and the end of term formal dinner known as Wind Out.

Both Abby and Milo see first-hand the rewards of their efforts. Not only are fellow students coming to them to discuss their concerns, fears and challenges, but they are also seeing Renison changing to better meet the needs of students. "It's so rewarding to see that when we make recommendations, change happens," said Milo. "The Link Inclusion Lounge is a perfect example. We asked for a comfortable space for students to come together, with soft couches and warm lighting – not overhead fluorescents. And the College delivered. That's a big win."

Both Milo and Abby want to encourage other students to consider becoming peer leaders; "don't be afraid to make mistakes. You don't have to be perfect. Student leadership opportunities show other students that we are all human. We all make mistakes. We learn and move on." Words to live by.

Thank you to our Donors

To each of our many donors, thank you for your generous support of Renison University College.

At Renison, faculty and students are helping to change the world. Supporters like you help to ensure that Renison continues its strong presence as a place of education and social change within our community, nationally, and internationally.

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